

More than 120,000 acres of Delaware farmland now preserved as program marks 20th year

Media: A list of the 17 properties included in the latest round is [available online](#), along with a [map showing their locations](#).

DOVER – More than 120,000 acres of Delaware farmland are now permanently preserved for future generations, state officials announced today, marking the 20th anniversary of the state's preservation program.

With 17 farms on 2,245 acres entering the latest round of the program, the new milestone means that 24 percent of First State farmland is now preserved for perpetuity. There are now 825 farms preserved permanently statewide.

"Protecting farmland is vital to helping farmers thrive and our economy grow," said Governor Jack A. Markell. "Agriculture drives jobs in Delaware, and keeping a solid base of farmland helps that immensely. It also adds to our state's open space and natural areas, which enhance our quality of life. Our state's farm leaders should be applauded for reaching this milestone and for their work over the last 20 years ensuring that Delaware is a leader in keeping farmland active and thriving."

The latest round of properties includes two in New Castle County, eight in Kent County and seven in Sussex County.

Keeping land in farming across the state is a core mission of the Department of Agriculture, said Secretary of Agriculture Ed Kee.

“We are extremely pleased to see the strong interest and support in this voluntary program over the last two decades from more than 800 farmers,” Kee said. “Without their commitment to keeping land in farming, we would not have so much valuable agricultural land pledged to that purpose for our children and grandchildren.”

The Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Foundation approves all applications, using an impartial discounted ranking system that maximizes benefits for taxpayers. The Foundation does not own the land, but rather purchases landowners’ development rights and has a permanent agricultural conservation easement placed on the property.

Delaware’s statewide program made its first round of easement purchases in 1996, and has since preserved 20 percent of New Castle County farmland, 35 percent of Kent County farmland and 15 percent of Sussex County farmland.

“This program has helped preserve farmland from Delmar to Hockessin and everywhere in between. It is an amazing success story for Delaware farmers,” said Bob Garey, a Felton-area farmer and chairman of the Foundation’s board of trustees.

Garey said the neutral nature of the program is one of its most important strengths.

“Farmers trust this program and know that they are getting the best possible deal,” he said. “They know their participation is voluntary, and that the rankings are utterly objective and unbiased.”

County governments can choose to partner with the state program and add county funds to select additional properties in their areas, leveraging state resources for the greatest impact. In the round announced today, Kent County contributed \$117,357.68 to help purchase development rights on six properties.

Delaware also has more than 56,000 acres of farmland in preservation districts, voluntary agreements in which landowners agree to only use their land for agriculture for 10 years. Farmers must enroll in a preservation district before they can sell an easement.

The Foundation's Board of Trustees includes representatives from agriculture and state agencies. Trustees in addition to Kee and Garey are Bill Vanderwende, vice-chairman; L. Allen Messick Jr., treasurer; William H. "Chip" Narvel Jr., secretary; State Treasurer Ken Simpler; Secretary of Natural Resources and Environmental Control David Small; Peter Martin; Theodore P. Bobola Jr.; Robert Emerson; and Janice Truitt.

#

Media contact:

[Dan Shortridge](#)

Director of Communications and Marketing

Delaware Department of Agriculture

302-698-4520